

Although alternatives such as creation of a new unit of the national park system or a special program of technical and financial assistance will require action by Congress, many ideas in this study can be pursued and implemented—as time and funding permits—by federal, state, and local governments and the private sector without any special authorization by Congress. For example, a private foundation either alone or in combination with other entities could create a national commemorative and research center.

In addition, some resources could be developed as part of a joint partnership between federal and other entities. These projects could use a variety of methods to accomplish mutually agreed-upon goals, with the federal participant assuming some tasks and other government and nongovernment organizations assuming other tasks. This mutual support would increase the effectiveness of each entity's programs.

Given the national significance of the story, the need for long-term preservation of resources, the public enjoyment potential, and the current amount of public ownership, the Underground Railroad story could become an example of a cooperative or partnership park. Several other products are being, or have been, produced in addition to the special resource study: a National Historic Landmark theme study, an interpretive

brochure and handbook, and an Underground Railroad “home page” on the Internet.

NPS will seek to coordinate efforts with parks in Canada to create an international commemoration of the Underground Railroad. Since northern underground lines extended into Canada, several sites, including the Josiah Henson House in Dresden, Ontario; John Free Walls Historic Site, Windsor, Ontario; and the Raleigh Township Centennial Museum/Elgin Settlement in North Buxton are available for public use, and are considered key places in developing a proposed international trail.

In short, the Underground Railroad is an example of a time in American history when people of different races, religions, and communities came together to help those who were willing to risk their lives for freedom. It was a “grass roots” effort, but one that had numerous successes. In the same way, whatever action Congress decides to take, grass roots efforts still can achieve successes in commemorating and interpreting the Underground Railroad.

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*National Park Service historian Barbara Tagger and interpretive planner Sharon A. Brown, Ph.D., both worked on the Underground Railroad project.*

Martin Blatt and Liza Stearns

## The Meaning of Slavery in the North

### Interpreting Historical Ties Between the Industrial North and Slave South

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**L**owell National Historical Park was established in 1978 to preserve and interpret Lowell's pioneering role in America's Industrial Revolution. The park includes over five miles of canals, mill complexes, operating gatehouses, mill worker housing, and a museum with an operating weave room. The park's primary objective is to make the complex story of the Industrial Revolution accessible to the public. Interpretive programs include exhibits, tours, several award winning slide shows, special events and festivals, and a hands-on museum education center. Between 400,000 and 500,000 people visit the park annually.

#### *Recognizing Interpretive Shortcomings*

Until recently, the park has done little to interpret the connection between Lowell's 19th-century textile industry and the South's system of slavery. The significance of this omission was heightened when the park invited a group of industrial policy experts to participate in planning a new video, *Work in the 21st Century*. One participant was James Jennings, a scholar from the Trotter Institute at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. The focus group began by viewing the slide show at the park visitor center, *Lowell: An Industrial Revelation*. Jennings pointed out that the otherwise very good program did not mention the slave labor upon which the textile

industry depended for cotton. With this omission, the program failed to make a critical historical link and further failed to speak to black Americans about their critical role in the early development of the United States economy.

#### *A Conference to Address the Problem*

To address the interpretation of slavery at the park, the staff organized a conference, *The Meaning of Slavery in the North*. The goals of the June 1993 conference were fourfold:

- (1) to raise awareness of the connection between Northern industrialists and Southern plantation owners;
- (2) to increase communication among interpreters, museum professionals, teachers, and academics;
- (3) to enhance the visibility and credibility of the park in the African-American community;
- (4) to broaden the traditional approach used to teach antebellum industrial history.

The first day of the conference was designed specifically

for museum educators and classroom teachers. The second and third days of the conference focused on scholarship, and attracted a host of academics and professionals from throughout the country.

#### *Positive Outcomes*

Parallel and related to the development of the conference, the park enhanced its interpretation of slavery in the permanent Boot Cotton Mills Museum exhibit. The museum's slide show, *Wheels of Change: The First Century of American Industry*, includes a very clear reference to the links between North and South: "The profitable but unholy business alliance between the Yankee 'Lords of the Loom' and the Southern 'Lords of the Lash'...." In addition, the installation of a reproduction slave shackle in a plantation economy exhibit, and the revision of accompanying text, greatly strengthened these connections.

There have been exciting outcomes directly stemming from the conference. Several instructors from Boston-area university teacher-training programs have modeled two weekend conferences for

student teachers after the Lowell conference. The Tsongas Industrial History Center, a hands-on museum education center jointly operated by the National Park Service and the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, and co-sponsor of the 1993 conference, organized a day-long history conference for middle and secondary school teachers closely following the outline of the Lowell conference. Subsequently, the Tsongas Center has piloted a new curriculum kit, "Lords of the Lash," that focuses on the connection between industrial North and slave South. The Center has also integrated this thematic link into its on-site education programs.

Finally, the success of the conference and stated interest in the topic by conference attendees prompted Park Historian Martin Blatt and conference speaker David Roediger to co-edit a collection of essays based on conference proceedings. This collection will be published by Garland Publishing.

#### *What Have We Learned?*

The success and varied outcomes of the conference have a number of implications for Lowell National Historical Park and the National Park Service. It is possible to interpret history in a manner that includes the historical experiences of more than the majority culture. African Americans do have reason to visit Lowell National Historical Park. Sources for lesser-known elements of history can be accessed. Interpreters can tell these stories in a way that invites the public to ask their own questions and discover the shortcomings of "History as We Know It."

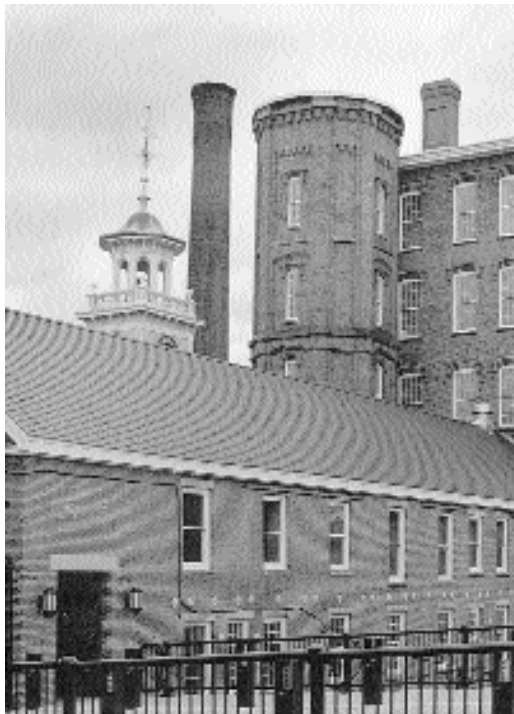
#### *"Hidden History"*

Historic sites across the nation contain "hidden histories." These untold histories encompass the lives and struggles of people who have traditionally been excluded from the historic record. As interpreters and historians—as keepers of some of the country's finest natural and cultural resources—it is our responsibility to make these stories and experiences accessible to the public. By enhancing interpretive programming to relate the history of the United States in its full richness and complexity, our sites will have relevance to a broader audience; this audience is the caretaker of our resources.

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*Photo by Gretchen Sanders Joy, courtesy Lowell National Historical Park.*